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ABSTRACT

The business community is becoming recognized as an important partner in educational reform. Although more traditional adopt-a-school programs and career-day activities remain popular, the growing national concern over education and its perceived economic impact have compelled businesses to become agents of change. Business-led organizations such as the National Alliance of Business (NAB), the Business Roundtable (BRT), and the Committee for Economic Development have taken leadership roles in supporting systemic education reform. Encouraged by these national organizations, businesses at the state and local levels are directly participating in state education policy arenas. This report describes Ohio's state-level business-education partnership, discusses why it was formed, and explores how it continues to influence education policy and practice in the state. (GLR)

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In Brief

Education Policy Studies

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Business Involvement in Ohio's Education Reform

Summary

Today the business community is recognized as an important partner in education reform. Although more traditional adopt-a-school programs and career-day activities remain popular, the growing national concern over education and its perceived economic impact has compelled businesses to become agents of change. Business-led organizations such as the National Alliance of Business (NAB), The Business Roundtable (BRT), and the Committee for Economic Development have taken leadership roles in supporting systemic education reform. Encouraged by these national organizations, businesses at the state and local levels are directly participating in state education policy arenas. This *In Brief* describes Ohio's state-level business-education partnership, discusses why it was formed, and explores how it continues to influence education policy and practice in the state.

Background

Education reform has been a priority of both Governor George V. Voinovich and the business community in Ohio. Together they have forged a strong partnership to further Ohio's progress toward systemic reform. William H. Kolberg, president of the National Alliance of Business, said, "I use what is going on in this state as perhaps the best example in the country of a public-private partnership. It will help shape far-reaching education legislation in Ohio."

Private sector involvement in education reform has led to numerous successes in Ohio. Both business leaders and gubernatorial staff indicate that the business community's input broadens the base of support for education reform and also increases public support for change. In addition, the professional training and organizational and analytical knowledge and skills of the private sector enhance educators' message of reform. Because of their position in the community, businesses also provide access to state legislators.

When business leaders advocate education reform they do so not only as responsible community members, but also because it is in their enlightened self-interest to do so. To be competitive in an international economy, the private sector needs well trained workers who are capable of adapting to new technology and work requirements. Moreover, businesses' involvement to improve American education also helps ensure an educated, affluent population to buy their goods and services. Business leaders recognize the linkages that exist among education, income, and consumer purchasing. Finally, businesses have a stake in the local education system because it directly affects the quality of life for company employees and their families. Higher crime rates, increased dropout levels, and greater demands for social services are all negative effects of a poor education system.

The Business Roundtable has made a ten-year commitment to improve the elementary and secondary education system nationwide. BRT fosters the development of state-level public-private partnerships. Encouraged by the national BRT, key companies within Ohio have been involved in the state's systemic reform efforts.

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The 1990 election of Governor Voinovich further encouraged the involvement of the private sector in Ohio's education reform efforts. He has set a precedent of working with the business community on education and of focusing on children's issues with his initiatives at the local, state, and national levels.

The Role of Business in Ohio Education Reform

Governor Voinovich has institutionalized business involvement in Ohio education reform through the Governor's Education Management (GEM) Council. The participating companies have helped shape the state's education agenda.

The council was created by executive order on March 15, 1991, to galvanize Ohio's corporate community to work on education reform. Serving as its chairman, Governor Voinovich has played a lead role in the council since its inception.

GEM is a volunteer council that has representatives from the state board of education, the board of regents of the state university system, and the teachers and administrators' associations, as well as legislative leaders, business leaders, and other civic leaders. The council provides guidance and leadership by recommending educational reforms that will improve school management and performance. It currently meets a few times per year, though there is ongoing communication between members and staff. Members also attend numerous state and local education events as representatives of the council.

GEM plays an instrumental role in involving Ohio businesses in the state's efforts to meet the National Education Goals. Some of the council initiatives to date that have helped channel business activity are highlighted below, along with other public-private partnerships designed to support education improvement in Ohio.

Organization Study of the Ohio Department of Education. In August 1991, an organizational study of the structure and responsibilities of the state department of education was completed. Four GEM Council companies—BF Goodrich, Goodyear, Procter and Gamble, and TRW—with advisory support from NAB and BRT, donated the services and time of their management and organization experts to help with the state study. This corporate contribution totaled about 3,000 hours valued at nearly $300,000. The recommendations proposed in *Model for the Future*, the organizational study sponsored by the GEM Council, were reviewed by the state board of education and have been used to restructure the Ohio Department of Education. They included strengthening collaborative efforts in education, deregulating the current system, and changing the focus of the department from auditing and monitoring to research, support, and service.

Selection Process for the New State Superintendent of Public Instruction. At the Governor's request, in the summer of 1991 the state board of education considered the suggestions of the Governor and members of the GEM Council in developing criteria for selecting the new state superintendent of public instruction. Although there was no formal role for the Governor and the business community in this process, their assistance facilitated understanding of the need for visionary leadership for education in Ohio. In August 1991, Dr. Ted Sanders was unanimously selected for the position by the state board.

Gap Analysis. The GEM Council commissioned the state's gap analysis to determine Ohio's status relative to achievement of the six National Education Goals and BRT's nine essential components of a successful education system. Unique among the states participating in BRT gap analyses, Ohio used an "inside strategy." Although assistance was provided by out-of-state consultants from NAB and BRT, staff of Ohio's educational and political leadership took the lead in conducting the analysis and developing the recommendations. The gap analysis initiative helped shape Ohio's 1994-95 state budget for education and will continue to influence future reform legislation.

Ohio Education Summits I and II. Governor Voinovich, together with Ohio's legislative leadership, the Ohio Department of Education, and the GEM Council, held two education summits in February and December 1992. The summits brought together key policymakers, educators, business leaders, members of philanthropic organizations, and parents to develop a shared vision of education for Ohio. The input gathered from the two summits was then incorporated into the gap analysis recommendations and strategies, thus impacting the reform initiatives pursued by the state.

State Progress Report. On September 30, 1992, Ohio released its second report detailing the state's progress toward achieving the National Education Goals. Serving on the Progress Report Steering Committee, GEM Council representatives played a leadership role in the development of the report, *Expanding Opportunities for Success*. Members of the private sector ensured benchmarks were established for each of the six goals. They also provided invaluable suggestions for creating a publication that was understandable and accessible to the general public. GEM Council support was crucial to the production of this report, which won a National Governors'

Association Chairman's Award for Outstanding Reporting on the National Education Goals.

Ohio 2000 Initiative. Launched in November 1991, Ohio 2000 seeks to encourage communities to explore the need for positive change in education and to motivate citizens to implement reforms. As of December 1992, more than 100 communities had joined Ohio 2000. Ohio 2000 encourages all members of the community to be involved in putting together a shared vision that will guide local education improvement efforts throughout the remainder of the twentieth century. Most recently, the Ohio School Boards Association, in cooperation with the Ohio Department of Education and the Governor's office, developed a communications piece to encourage every school district to develop a local goals report using the state document as a model.

Ohio Education Improvement Steering Committee. To significantly expand public and legislative support for completing the task of education reform and ensuring a world-class education system in Ohio, a statewide steering committee of more than fifty members from corporations and statewide organizations recently has been formed. Co-chaired by the state superintendent of public instruction and the vice-president for public affairs of Procter and Gamble, the committee's cross-cutting membership includes private sector leaders, educators, parent-teacher association members, religious leaders, and representatives of labor organizations and social service agencies. The steering committee's purpose is to mobilize public support for education reform, especially for changes that were not funded in the most recently passed legislative package.

School Readiness Planning. In 1992 Governor Voinovich was appointed to chair the National Governors' Association Action Team on School Readiness, which was composed of ten Governors and two chief executive officers. Ohio businesses have played a substantial role in focusing attention on Goal One: "All children in America will start school ready to learn." In conjunction with the Ohio Business Roundtable's Education Task Force, the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, the Ohio Department of Education, the Ohio Head Start Association, and the Ohio Association for the Education of Young Children, Governor Voinovich has undertaken a statewide project to assess early childhood service availability and to complete action plans to address service gaps at the community level. Called "Operation Ready to Learn," the project incorporates agency work with local business advisory councils in each school district. Such activity has broadened the level of business involvement in education reform, especially among smaller, local businesses.

Lessons from Ohio's Partnership

Ohio's experience in establishing public-private partnerships in support of education reform offers a number of lessons for other states. For business involvement to be successful, the following factors are important.

Strong, Committed, and United Leadership Is Essential. Elected and appointed political leaders and business leaders who are committed to education improvement and who are willing to work together can move the reform agenda forward more successfully and quickly. Such strong coalitions add credibility to legislative action and help mobilize widespread public support.

Partnerships Must Be Broadly Based. For education reform to succeed, the community at large must "buy in." To build and sustain consensus for change, the support of key legislators, education associations, and other concerned groups must be sought in the early stages of partnership-building. Business involvement should extend beyond the relationship with the Governor's office; the private sector needs to work with all constituencies. Not only does this improve the chances of passing legislative reforms, but it also builds mutual understanding and respect among educators, business leaders, and government officials. One way to ensure a broad-based partnership is to create a state steering committee or similar entity. Such a cross-cutting, representative entity serves to broaden corporate and public support and to encourage state legislators wary of the political risks of enacting bold reforms.

Local Business Involvement Is Important. State business and education leaders also should engage local chambers of commerce or other community coalitions in activities to broaden corporate involvement. One such activity is the preparation of a local progress report on meeting the National Education Goals. Local public-private partnerships have a more direct impact on the community and are an important supplement to an information source on state-level programs.

Business Can Use Its Expertise to Communicate with the Public. Marketing strategies for increasing political and public support are best developed as the education reform package is formulated, not as an afterthought. The marketing skills and consumer-orientation of the private sector are invaluable to this effort. The communications plan also should include a strategy for responding to the arguments of those who oppose change.

Direct Business Interaction with Schools Is Important. Business programs that offer direct contact with schools and encourage interaction between employees and students still are the most prevalent and most important form of business involvement in education. Private sector involvement in the policymaking arena does not preclude more traditional, local-based initiatives such as adopt-a-school and corporate mentor programs. Business support need not be confined to one form of involvement—local projects, state steering committees, or national policy discussions. As demonstrated by the role business is playing in Ohio, there are multiple dimensions of corporate support.